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The
Blessedness of those who die in the Lord.

A SERMON,

Preached on Advent Sunday, December 1st, 1878,
at Westerfield Church.

BY THE

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With Extracts from Sermons by the
Dean of Westminster and Canon Farrar.

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A SERMON.

REVELATION XIV. 13.

“ And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours ; and their works do follow them.”

MY text says, Happy are the dead. Doubtless there are some ignorant people, and some, alas, who are not ignorant, who say it is so : but have they any reason for what they say ? or do they really believe in their hearts the sentence they pronounce with their lips ? Job tells us that in the grave “ The wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.” No more hunger and thirst, or toil and weariness ; no more pain and

suffering; no more care by day, or weary sleepless nights; no more dread of evil,—NO: not for the body, for “the dust has turned to the earth as it was,” and it remains insensible as the stone or the turf that covers it. But do we call that *happiness*? Do we call a rock, or a block of wood happy? happy because it *cannot* see, or taste, or feel, or know anything? We mean not the senseless body: we know there was something more than this in the dear friend who a minute before he fell asleep, looked into our face with as much intelligence as in the meridian of life, or pressed our hand with as much sympathy and love as a whole torrent of words could convey. We know that spirit is not dead,—not lying in the grave: it has simply gone away from us to live somewhere else, and be alive for evermore.

But are we sure, then, that the dead are happy? True, they have no more pain of body; but what of that? Who does not know that the most terrible bodily suffering is as nothing when compared with anguish of mind! There are thousands

who if they die as they lived can by no fancy or perversion of thought be conceived of as happy. They hated every thing that was pure and true, and like God; and they loved every thing that was base and vile,—bad words, bad company, falsehood, dishonesty, drunkenness, and uncleanness. Heaven is no place for them; saints and angels are no companions for them: it is impossible but that they must go “to their own place,” to be with spirits like themselves. Brethren, we need not say or think about what is called material torment,—such as fire and brimstone, the worm that never dies, the fire that is never quenched,—though, remember, these are the words of the Holy Ghost, and may not without sin be lightly or irreverently turned aside; but we need not now refer to them. It is certainly the most horrible doom of itself for a man to be banished from all that is pure and beautiful and good in the universe of God, and to be shut up in prison with all that are like himself, unholy and unclean,—banished from God’s fair earth, and from His

fairer heaven. I cannot picture to myself a sorer punishment than this. It is this thought which made David cry out with so much anguish, Oh, "Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with men of blood!" Surely the bare thought of such a doom should make you cry with real earnestness, Oh Lord, save me from my sins, and help me to escape them; oh, save me, that I be not drawn down by them to that terrible place of torment! I think you will see how idle it is to say, Oh, how happy are the dead! They may, for aught we know, be in the most fearful state of pain and misery.

But my text does not stop to say this: it says, "Blessed are the dead which *die in the Lord*." That surely makes all the difference. But you will say, Tell us what it means,—what is it to die *in the Lord*? The expression denotes the character of the true believer. He is *in the Lord*: he is one who belongs to the Lord; his hope is in Him; his whole faith and trust are in Him,—nay, his whole life is in Him, body and soul: and it is

because he thus lives in Him he cannot fail to die in Him. He was given to the Lord at first, and was baptized in Him: he was confirmed in this surrender of himself to Him; he remained all his life a frequenter of the Lord's house, an associate and companion of His people, a friend and benefactor to His cause. He was constantly at the Lord's Table, eating His flesh and drinking His blood in the Holy Sacrament of His death, living a life of obedience to His holy will and commandments; persevering and going on in the same course to the very end,—for sixty, seventy, eighty years; and, therefore, as I said, he could not fail to die in Him, as one of Christ's own children and faithful servants, whom He will receive and welcome into His arms, and give to him a place in His own blessed home among those who have already arrived there.

And for such as these there is in reality no death. They who thus live and believe in Him, do in fact *never die*. There is nothing in death which can harm them. The sting of death is sin;

but their sins have been repented and forsaken, and therefore they are pardoned; and when they depart from this life, they are purified and cleansed from all the sins which clung to them through the infirmities of life. They enter into God's rest without spot and blameless: they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Because they are thus without fault and blameless, they are *happy*: no one can tell how happy! No unholy thought, no desire after evil, no fear of ever falling into it any more. They are safe, and therefore they are happy. They meet, too, there all those whom they loved best, and who most deserved their love; they can learn and know all that they most wished on earth to understand. When their desires are thus purified, they find in heaven all that can fully satisfy them,—all that which can gratify their most ardent wishes and the deepest longings of their nature, so that they are blessed and happy beyond all expression and imagination.

Now just notice the wonderfully strong assurance

we have of this fact. It is asserted with almost as much strength as if it were confirmed by those two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, and it is done purposely that the heirs of promise may have strong consolation and know the unchangeableness of God's counsel, that when death comes to them they may have no room for doubt or fear, but be able to put their hand as it were into their Father's hand and say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." Their feet are fixed upon Him as the Rock of Ages, and they have underneath them the everlasting arms. "I heard a voice from heaven," from God Himself, "saying unto me, *Write.*" Let this promise be recorded in my Book of mercy, the pages of which, however frail they appear, are graven as with an iron pen, or as if with lead in the rock for ever: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." That is the record: the decree of heaven which has gone forth and cannot be changed. And

then the Holy Ghost, who inspired this writer, puts to it His seal,—His testimony: the witness of God, His *Amen*. “Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.” Theirs is indeed *rest*,—a rest worthy to be so called; not a dreamless sleep, not a state of entire and perfect unconsciousness: you cannot call *that* happiness. True, it is not suffering or sorrow; but it is not blessedness. True rest is to be fully alive and conscious of what the rest is,—*how* full of peace, how free from fear and dread of evil, *how* sure that it will never suffer diminution or change, but go on growing and becoming more peaceful and blessed for evermore.

Now just notice one more reason given for their happiness. They rest from all their labours; and their works *follow* them. Not one thing of all they did for God, or suffered for Him, is lost or forgotten, or is fruitless in its results. All their works are treasured up and made to follow them. Mark well, these doings of theirs, excellent as they are, approved and accepted of God, do not go

before them. They do not open for them the doors of heaven; they do not form their title of admission there. Every one that comes to that eternal rest disclaims all idea of merit or desert of any kind, in anything they have themselves done. Oh, no, they say: "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name be the glory." It is Christ, our Leader and Captain, who goes before. What He has done, what He has suffered,—His deeds, not ours, have the right of entrance there! We only trod in His steps; we only followed His example, and have done nothing but as partakers of His Spirit and His grace. To Him, to Him *alone*, be all the glory.

Nevertheless, saith the Spirit, "their works do follow them." They follow them upon earth. The truths they taught, the example they set, the charities they have given, their earnest prayers,—God will never suffer them to die. They live on after they are dead, pointing out to others the good way, and drawing others on in the road to heaven. And they follow them into heaven itself; to the

very tribunal and judgment bar of Almighty God. The Lord Himself, who laid down His life for them, when He puts the diadem on their brow which His own fingers have woven, when He pronounces them free from all sentence of judgment, will say, before all those who are standing by, "I was hungry, and ye fed Me: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: sick, and in prison, and ye came unto Me." "I adjudge you the reward of grace, not of debt,—*eternal life* with Me in heaven."

I must, however, just notice two little words which I have omitted,—*from henceforth*. There is a contrast here between the state of those who die in sin and those who die in the Lord. Of such as suffer the punishment of sinners, it is said, "They have no rest day nor night." There is no suspense, no alleviation in their sufferings. On the contrary of these beloved ones, it is said, *They* rest. And it is not a thing they have to wait for; it comes upon them in a moment, at the very instant of their

release: "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." In that context (2 Cor. v.) St. Paul compares our mortal body to a tent; the cloth or covering of it especially. The stakes are all drawn out of the earth, the cords are untied, then the ring is loosened from the top of the pole, and in a moment it is dissolved; it drops down in an instant on to the ground. And the soul within!—What of it? Is it naked? Is it houseless, homeless? Oh, no: it looks about, and behold it is in heaven! It has no change of place or state to be conscious of. It is at home. It is in heaven. Do you suppose that if this were not the case St. Paul would have said, "To be with Christ is far better,"—better than to serve Him here below? Surely working for Christ is better than slumbering in the grave. St. Paul did not think of sleeping in the grave; he thought of being with Christ, and reigning with Him; and that from the moment he fell asleep on earth, from that very moment he was to be with Christ, awake in heaven.

You all know why I have taken this text this

morning. It is on purpose that I might give you a faithful and true picture of the life and death of one so recently and suddenly taken from us. Happy is she who has thus died in the Lord, from henceforth, *for* she rests from her labours, and her works do follow her. The Lord was pleased to endow her with gifts and graces to occupy and adorn the position to which, step by step, He was pleased to elevate her. As her sphere was raised and extended, so was more grace given her to fill it, and to use her influence for good towards relatives, friends, and acquaintances innumerable. These charities and gifts for usefulness began, as they always should do, at home; so that those who were closest to her and knew her best could not fail to love her and prize her the most. Nor was all this an outside show of life without true devotion to inspire and fill it. It sprung from genuine love to God and His cause. The spirit of humility and devotion breathed about her a fragrance, which satisfied all who came in contact with it of its vitality and truth. How much

more I might say and be within the limits of sober truth, and without (what she would have so earnestly deprecated) a grain of mere compliment or flattery! but there is no need for it. Only I think when we see one whom Christ has made so comely, through the comeliness which He has put upon her, we ought to admire His workmanship, and to give Him the glory of it. He has taken her to Himself,—a loss to us all; but to some, such a loss as only the sight of her in heaven can ever make up again. Well, if we have patience, God will not fail to give us, in this life, all the support necessary for our journey, till the time comes when we too shall go into rest; and there shall be no more sorrow, nor sighing, nor parting, and no more death, for the former things shall have passed away.

My friends do not go away from this place without asking yourselves, If I die, shall I be happy? Yes: if your sins be repented of,—forsaken and forgiven,—if your lives be holy and devout. If not, remember it is a fearful thing to

fall into the hands of the living God. In spite of all men may say, "It is appointed unto all men once to die, and after death the judgment:" hear this and rejoice, or hear it and tremble. Remember that your position in this world and the next is your own choice. God has said, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Why will ye die, O house of Israel; therefore return ye, repent and live."



APPENDIX A.

Extract from a Sermon by the Dean of Westminster.

NOVEMBER 24TH, 1878.

MALACHI III. 16.

“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.”

HOW largely is the power of His presence felt in the silence which falls upon a household, or a neighbourhood, when a soul which has wrought its work amongst us takes its flight from this earthly scene! How often has this silence descended upon us during the past year! How prolonged is the echo of such a rent in the social and spiritual fabric of this our little circle here, even since I last preached within these walls!

And now how dark the void which has fallen on this neighbourhood in the last few days! One familiar face—the inseparable companion of the good white head which all Westminster knows so

well: the partner in all his good works, in this Abbey and its surrounding parishes, for more than forty years—has been withdrawn from the congregation with which she so often joined in the daily prayers,—from the schools, the missions, the poor, the sick, where her presence was so long and so dearly valued.

Such a long life of beneficent Christian usefulness is indeed a succession of angel foot-falls, quiet and unobserved at the time; but when they cease to tread our thresholds, their remembrance sounds in our ears like the voice of a trumpet.

We know that there was here something which the Lord has heard, and which was worth His hearing. God grant that these sacred echoes may be treasured up by those who feel that no music is so sweet as the memory of past good deeds! God grant that this memory may bring peace and consolation to those who in such a dear remembrance can find the pledge of future blessedness, because it is the pledge of reunion in the presence of Him who is the Fountain of all light and of all life!

APPENDIX B.

*Extract from a Sermon at St. Margaret's, Westminster,
by the Rector, Canon Farrar.*

NOVEMBER 24TH, 1878.

AND here, my brethren, I must pause for one moment, to speak of one such life which has just passed away.

Lady Hatherley, who died since last Sunday, had been for very many years a member of this congregation, and I know not where it would have been more possible to find an example of the quiet beauty, the holy attractiveness of a life which walked in the Spirit,—a life which was hid with Christ in God. Blessed with wealth and rank, how *easy* it would have been, how natural it would have seemed for her, to live as so many others live who having received these gifts from God are so *keenly* aware of their *privileges*, so *little* conscious of their duties, of their *responsibilities*.

How easy it would have been for her to live haughtily aloof from the miseries of the unhappy and the struggles of the poor;—how easy to join the crowd of useless sentimentalists, who even if they go so far as to *sigh* for wretchedness, but shun the wretched,

“Nursing in some delicious solitude
Their dainty loves and slothful sympathies.”

How *easy* would it have been for her to live as such multitudes of others live,—in the small selfishness of small and vulgar aims; to join in all the gossip and malice, in all the folly and fashion, in all the intrigue and jealousy of what calls itself society; to live the commonplace worldly life, merging into the dull, apathetic end,—the youth of fashion followed by the age of cards. When these die, how *small* is the difference, except sometimes, alas, for the evil that they have made to the world! They have *died*, but never *lived*; for “she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.”

What a *jest*,—what a poor play,—what a dance

of bubbles on a stained and shallow stream,—what a *godless, empty*, meaningless frivolity their day on earth has been! And how little it matters,—how little it matters to *any one*,—when they end their *useless, self-indulgent, unprofitable* lives!

It was not thus, as many of you know, my friends,—it was not *thus* that Lady Hatherley lived. Far other, unspeakably nobler, transcendently more worthy of a Christian, were her aims! In one word, she strove to do good. She lived, not for herself, but for others. She loved the poor, and was *kind* to them. She felt, and she tried, to her best power, to alleviate the miseries of the world. She worked for them,—not with the indifferent almsgiving, which is always useless, and often injurious,—but with the loving, thoughtful, sympathizing, self-denying *charity*, which does more good by giving a cup of cold water with a word of kindly sympathy, than by carelessly flinging a purse of gold.

My brethren, such a life, and all the more because it is so rare,—a life, adorned not with gold

and apparel of the latest fashion, but as becometh women professing godliness, with *good works*,—even as the holy women of old adorned themselves, such a life, precious to England, precious to the Church, is precious most of all to *us*, among whom she lived and laboured. Of her, it was as *true*, as it is idly *said* of many, that “when the ear heard her, it blessed her; and when the eye saw her, then it gave her witness.” The blessing of Him that was ready to perish came upon her, and she caused “the widow’s heart to sing for joy.”

In an age of pride and luxury, her’s was that “ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

Because her thoughts were with things above,—with whatsoever things are *true*, and *pure*, and *lovely*, and *honest*, and of good report,—therefore the sullied wave of the world’s ungodliness—its prurience, its malice, its self seeking, and its greed—scarce touched her feet.

My brethren, from such an example,—so pure, so sweet, so kind,—we all may learn what that

meaneth: "*Walk in the Spirit*, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." And, my brethren, for such a death we cannot greatly mourn.

We can mourn for *ourselves*,—that one of the very few who are really good is no longer in the midst of us. We can mourn for him who is left alone, after well-nigh half a century of happy union,—mourn for that good white head, which all well know, now bowed in the touching resignation of an old man's grief. But for *her* we cannot mourn, because we know that it is far happier for Christ's redeemed when, after life's trials and sorrows, "God hath given His beloved sleep." Nay, rather let us all,—above all, let every Christian woman here, who desires to live not a mean and a vulgar and a self-seeking, but a true, sweet, noble, life,—let us all try to learn from her example that the *end* of the commandment is "*love out of a pure heart* and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned:" not fashion, or comfort, or *party religionism*, or selfish domesticity, or a brawling assertion of rights.

Little is the voice of human eulogy to an ear on which has broken the angels' song. But this we know of her,—and in this, my sisters in Christ, may you all learn to follow her, as she followed Christ,—that

“Her care was fixed, and zealously attent
To fill her odorous lamp with deeds of light,
And hope that reaps not shame.”



